

Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture

NEH Summer Institute for Teachers 2012

Philip Goff, Arthur E. Farnsley II, and Rachel Wheeler
Co-Directors

The Bible in American Life

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Abstract

The NEH Summer Institute for Teachers will support the studies of twenty-five talented teachers from across the nation as they join with nationally renowned scholars to explore how religion has shaped, and been shaped by, the American experience. The institute directors, Philip Goff, Arthur Farnsley, and Rachel Wheeler, are all noted scholars in their field, whose work encompasses a wide range of subject matter and methodologies. The institute will enable participants from many different fields to develop new materials on American religion that can be incorporated into their current curricula. An English teacher introducing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for instance, will be better prepared to discuss the nexus of religion and race in the context of nineteenth-century America. A civics teacher focusing on the origins of the American government will be able to incorporate discussion about the religion of the founders and the ways in which the First Amendment has shaped American society.

The prime goal of The Bible in American Life project is to gain insight for clergy and scholars on Bible-reading as a religious practice. We are particularly interested in how people use the Bible in their personal lives, how religious communities and even the internet shape individuals' comprehension of scripture, and how individual and communal understandings of scripture influence American public life. Employing both quantitative methods (the General Social Survey and a local survey) and qualitative research (focus-group interviews, historical analysis, and other means), we hope to provide an unprecedented perspective on the Bible's role outside the context of worship, in the lived religion of a broad cross-section of Americans both now and in the past. Such data will be invaluable to clergy and seminar professors seeking more effective ways to teach and preach scripture in an age saturated with information and technology. The results of the project also will help scholars seeking to understand recent changes in American Christianity.